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ABSTRACT

Noting that the field of adult vocational education has grown significantly, this paper outlines one way that the field of communication studies has been specifically and selectively applied to the initial and continuing professional development needs of adult vocational educators at the University of Technology in Sydney Australia. The paper notes that this field is constituted by human resource developers, industry trainers, instructors from the armed services, and vocational teachers in technical and further education colleges--groups which, for the most part, form the undergraduate and graduate student body in schools of adult and vocational education in Australian universities. The paper places particular emphasis on the continuing evolution of a new applied theoretical perspective known as "adult communication management." The paper discusses the general features, underlying assumptions, and the conceptual framework of adult communication management. The paper concludes with a discussion of how adult communication management should continue to develop as a field of study in adult vocational education within Australian universities. (Ninety-one references are attached.) (RS)

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Adult Communication Management in Adult Vocational Education: A Contemporary Australian Perspective

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Abstract:

In recent years, the field of adult vocational education has grown significantly. The professional client-groups which constitute this field of practice include human resource developers, industry trainers, instructors from the armed services, and vocational teachers in technical and further education colleges. These groups, for the most part, form the undergraduate and graduate student body in schools of adult and vocational education in Australian universities.

Within the curricula which these students follow in order to be accredited and upgraded in their career paths, the study of communication has gradually become perceived to be critical for the competent performance of relevant professional roles. For example, it has developed a reputation for being one of the most popular and valued areas of study in the School of Adult Vocational Education at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS).

This paper outlines one way that the field of communication studies has been specifically and selectively applied to the initial and continuing professional development needs of adult vocational educators at UTS. Particular emphasis is placed on the recent and continuing evolution of a new applied theoretical perspective known as "adult communication management." In addition to a description of the current rationale for this perspective, a selection of the comments and perceptions of recent graduate students is also presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of how adult communication management should continue to develop as a field of study in adult vocational education within Australian universities.

Communication Studies in Australian University Schools of Adult Vocational Education

Within some Australian universities, "adult vocational education" has rapidly developed since the early eighties as a significant field of practice. Essentially , the field of adult vocational education comprises all professionals who could be classified as vocational educators working primarily with adult learners. These vocational educators include teachers in technical and further education (TAFE) colleges, technical trade instructors in the defense forces, and trainers from both the private and public sectors.

At least one university in each state of Australia has a school which caters for the needs of adult vocational educators and trainers. Not all of these schools carry the name of "adult vocational education". Some of these schools, for example, are known as schools of "human resource development", whilst others are called schools of "vocational teacher education and training". Nevertheless, all of these schools have one common focus viz. a concern predominantly with the professional development of adult learners rather than with the teaching of schoolchildren. This professional development occurs both in the initial teacher preparation baccalaureate phase and in various continuing professional education courses ranging to doctorates. Indeed, this notion of professional development in adult vocational education is inextricably associated with the belief that learning is a lifelong process.

One of the central aims of this lifelong learning curriculum for adult vocational educators is the development and refinement of communication competence. Recent Australian government policy documents, for example, have set an unequivocal agenda for educational reform by stressing, *inter alia*, the importance of developing "key competencies" in the areas of language and communication, personal and interpersonal relationships, and problem-solving, especially in relation to critical thinking (Finn Committee Report, 1991; Mayer Committee Report, 1992). The thinking behind these reports is that the development of these key competencies in young adults and adolescents should make the nation more able to be productive, creative, and as one former prime minister put it, "clever".

Even before these reports were issued recently, some Australian research had already been undertaken on some of these "key competencies" in relation to the field of adult vocational education. For example, studies of the critical thinking abilities of Australian vocational teachers were recently undertaken (Kaye and Hager, 1991a; Hager and Kaye, 1991a). As a result, critical thinking was subsequently conceptualised from a human communication perspective (Kaye and Hager, 1991b) and a process-oriented research agenda was developed (Hager and Kaye, 1991b).

With particular reference to interpersonal communication competence, previous scholarship in Australia regarded such higher-order competence as a generic ability or set of abilities (Irwin, 1981, 1985; Penman, 1981,1985). During the past few years, there has been a set of investigations as to how research into interpersonal communication competence and, more generally, communicator or communicative competence, can be identified and assessed within specific work-related contexts such as industry training (Kaye, 1989a; 1986a; 1986b; Kaye and McArthur, 1989), vocational teacher education (Kaye, 1992a), and adult education and training (Kaye, 1991, 1989a, 1989b, 1988b).

Much of this work has formed the basis for an emerging perspective which will be explained in the following section of this paper. This perspective is termed "Adult Communication Management" and forms the basis for a major sequence of study in the postgraduate courses in the Faculty of Education in the University of Technology, Sydney. There has been nothing formal or comprehensive written about this perspective. This paper, therefore, represents a first attempt at presenting an applied communication theory perspective which informs and illuminates the adult vocational education field of practice.

The Adult Communication Management Perspective

General features

There is always the danger of sounding pretentious when putting forward an allegedly "new" or "fresh" alternative perspective within the vast and highly theorised domain of "communication studies". In this instance, the risk has to be taken for a variety of reasons. For one thing, the adult communication management approach does not sit comfortably with the conventional divisions within the boundaries of contemporary communication theory. In effect, *the"adult communication management" perspective crosses the traditional boundaries which appear to separate interpersonal from organisational or instructional communication.*

Another important difference between the adult communication management (ACM) perspective and existing theoretical frameworks within the field of human communication is that *adult communication management theory draws from a number of diverse disciplinary approaches and backgrounds. As such, adult communication management theory is both multidisciplinary and eclectic.* It is not grounded solely in social interpretive theory, nor exclusively in psychologically oriented thinking, although it would be true to say that there is a strong leaning toward psychologically determined views of the world.

A third point to note about adult communication management is that, unlike several other contemporary theories of human communication, it does not derive its rationale exclusively from "communication" literature.

It has been suggested that the field of communication studies is not grounded in any single discipline but is rather a multidisciplinary field characterised by a number of issues and debates (Kaye, 1987). Some of these issues and debates appear to hold minimal interest for scholars in specialised areas of the communication studies field. For this reason, *adult communication management is a selective perspective,* concentrating on a set of issues relevant to the way people communicate with each other in various kinds of systems and organisations.

Finally, it may be worth emphasising that the adult communication management perspective is characterised by a distinctly applied nature. Although it purports to have very general applications, because most graduate students undertaking study in this area have been actively involved in adult and/or vocational education, this perspective has been quite deliberately associated with the adult vocational education field of practice. Nevertheless, there is no necessary reason as to why adult communication management should not be extended to any work-related contexts in which people need to communicate with each other.

One simple way of understanding the thrust of the adult communication management perspective is to separate the two key contributing concepts in the term. In this way, it is evident that the focus is specifically on adults rather than children. This is not to say, however, that, adult communication management theory is predicated on the assumption that adults invariably learn and communicate differently from non-adults. Despite earlier attempts by scholars like Knowles (1980) to make such distinctions by labelling adult learning processes as *andragogical* and children's formal educative experiences as *pedagogical,* such claims have since been seriously challenged (e.g. Tennant, 1986; Kaye, 1989a, 1988a), partly on the grounds that alleged differences of this kind are untested beliefs rather than validated principles.

Nevertheless, where applicable, adult communication management theory does draw on research and scholarship in human development. In so doing, it also recognises the pragmatically known and generally accepted differences between systems characterised by a children's culture and systems in which only adults communicate and operate. It is suggested that in future a modification of the present perspective to that of "child communication management" may be of some interest to communication scholars, particularly to those interested in the teaching of children.

The words "communication management" are used in a particular sense in this perspective. Essentially,communication management refers to the ways in which communicating individuals construct, coordinate, and clarify their meanings. There is also a suggestion here that if reciprocity occurs, that is to say, when individuals are acting toward and communicating with each other on the basis of mutually developed

understandings, these individuals are displaying facets or some form of *communication competence.*

At this point, it is important to note that within the adult communication management perspective, traditional conceptions and definitions of communication management are seen to be too limiting. For example, Farace, Monge and Russell (1979) saw communication management as a sort of gatekeeping function. More specifically,they argued that

in general, the communication manager should be located at the center of message flow in the organization.This means that the manager has knowledge of all important types of message flow (although the amount of direct control over that flow depends on the willingness of top management to delegate this authority). By operating in or near the center of the organization's message flow, the manager is able to serve as a bridge or liaison to the other units in the organization, and hence directly affect such characteristics as the quality, quantity, timing, and form of the messages these units receive and send (Farace, Monge, and Russell, 1979).

Thus, "communication managers" were conceived to be individuals who controlled the flow of information among the various members of systems or organisations.

More recently, Ticehurst, Walker and Johnston(1991) appeared to suggest that particular individuals within systems could be labelled "communication managers". These authors seemed to be promoting the idea that "communication managers" occupied certain kinds of positions, usually associated with human resource development/management or public relations/marketing types of functions. Based on this rationale, these investigators concluded that "position titles for people filling communication management roles were varied. Data from all phases suggested that responsibility for communication management is often shared between Human Resource Management/Development and Marketing/Public Affairs departments" (Ticehurst, Walker and Johnston, 1991: 94).

The view espoused in adult communication management theory is that all individuals within systems exercise some form of communication management, albeit in varying degrees of intensity, opportunity, or skill. Clearly, some people, because of the nature of their jobs, spend relatively large proportions of their time in interacting with others. Alternatively, there are inevitably persons who, by virtue of the tasks assigned to them, are not required to meet as frequently with colleagues from other departments, divisions, or sections of their particular systems.

Regardless of these evident differences, every individual within a system is potentially a "communication manager".This is a bit like saying that any person within a system is potentially a leader when the system provides opportunities for worker participation in corporate decision-making. As it

has been suggested, "anyone who contributes in any way to the accomplishment of the goals of the system participates in system-oriented individual leadership" (Egan,1985:195). Like participative leadership, therefore, communication management within systems is characterised by the *interdependence* of all members of the system.

Underlying assumptions

There are several important assumptions upon which the conceptual framework of adult communication management theory rests. In part, these assumptions relate to ways in which adults learn about and perceive their intrapsychic and social worlds. Complementing these, however, are assumptions about the nature and performance of communication management by people within systems.

Assumptions about adult learning and perception.

Whilst it may be true, as has already been suggested, that hypothesised distinctions between the ways adults and non-adults learn are less convincing today than two decades ago, there are grounds for assuming that adults perceive their worlds differently from the ways children do. The noted genetic epistemologist Jean Piaget, for example, developed a robust collection of data to substantiate his claim that the child's construction of reality is qualitatively different from that of the adult (Piaget, 1929). In part, this difference could be accounted for by the powerful tendency for children to think animistically when confronted with seemingly mysterious and inexplicable phenomena or events, whereas adults would typically look for a "logical" or commonsense reason. *Assumption 1, therefore, is that in general adults view their worlds differently from the ways in which children do.*

The Piagetian literature also emphasises the developmental nature of thinking. According to Piaget, individuals progress during their growth from infancy to adulthood, through stages of cognitive development. Each stage is characterised by qualitatively different ways of reasoning and of viewing the world. Thus, whereas children typically explain their experience of their worlds egocentrically and through concrete modes of thought, the thinking of adults is characterised by *reciprocity*, or the ability to see things from someone else's viewpoint as well as from one's own. In addition, adults are assumed to have reached the stage of "formal operations" in which one's thinking is determined by the ability to exercise logic and to reason in propositional form.

In theory, therefore, adults differ from children in the ways they reason and think. This notion is supported by people like Ennis, Millman and Tomko (1985) who developed separate critical thinking tests for children and for adults. Thus, *Assumption 2 is that adults are able to reason and think in ways which do not typify the reasoning and thinking of children.* Whilst it is not denied that some children may be capable of reasoning in

relatively sophisticated ways, in general, children's thinking is assumed to be more concrete rather than abstract in nature.

Another critical difference between the ways adults and children learn and perceive their worlds relates to the significance of personal experience as a basis for knowing, acting, and communicating. It is probably true that all people learn a great deal through experience. The more experience people have, the more they are able to capitalise on it and use it to guide their communication with and behavior toward others. Obviously, children rely on a more limited range of experiences than adults do. For this reason, *Assumption 3 is that adults rely considerably more on experience as a basis for learning than do children.*

Whilst there is a strong relationship between experience and learning, particularly in the case of adults, the connection between learning and communication suggests that experience is closely associated with and thus influences the ways in which individuals communicate with others. Especially for adults, experience provides a means for both learning and communicating. In the latter case, adults use their interpersonal experiences to form impressions of individuals who enter their social worlds. These experiences become part of a cognitive structure which enables communicating individuals to establish, weaken, stabilise, develop, or terminate relationships with others.

Finally, it should be noted that a legitimate goal of adult learning is the attainment of some form of autonomy and self-direction. Whilst the communicative behavior of adults may broadly be categorised in terms of needs for interdependence, adult learning may be said to be progressing in a direction from facilitator or teacher control to that of personal or self-control. It has been argued, moreover, that personal control is strongly associated with the notion of "communicator" (or "communicative") competence as the ability of individuals to maximise the achievement of their goals (Parks, 1977; 1985). *Assumption 4, therefore, is that a major goal of adult learners is the development of their ability to be self-directed.*

Assumptions about the contexts in which adults communicate

Much of the adult communication management perspective is focused on how adults communicate with each other in the workplace. Just as children spend a substantial portion of their normal days in school rooms, adults occupy most of their salaried or career time in different kinds of organisations and work settings. The nature of these occupational systems to a large extent affect the type of interpersonal communication which is likely to eventuate amongst the members of these systems. On this basis, *Assumption 4 is that the communication between adults in work settings differs qualitatively from the communication between children in instructional non-domestic settings.*

It is equally important, however, to recognise that adult-adult communication will differ from one kind of system or organisational setting to another. The extent to which systems are open, flexible, hierarchical or "flat" in their management structures etc. constitutes a basis for identifying the nature and effectiveness of communication among the adults who collectively make up the particular system. Thus, *Assumption 5 is that communication between adults in one system or organisation may differ both qualitatively and quantitatively from patterns or forms of communication between adults in other systems.*

Although there are characteristics common to all interpersonal systems (Egan, 1991; 1985), the differences relate to the amount of communication between adults and the quality of that communication. Organisations whose mission statements focus on productivity to the exclusion of "quality of life" considerations, very often create a climate of adversarial and competitive communication. On the other hand, systems whose focus is on people and their needs, are often perceived by persons both from within and beyond as encouraging constructive and profitable dialogue among members.

Assumptions about the nature of communication

Whilst some scholars continue to refer to "acts" of communication, adult communication management theory prefers to regard communication as a process. An "act of communication" suggests that the communicative event is very much self-contained with, moreover, a clear beginning and a definable point of conclusion or termination. Not all communicative events, however, fall neatly into the classification of "acts". Alternatively, where they can be identified as "acts", the sum of several such acts could well be seen as forming a chain within a more global process.

Such a global process, moreover, may not have an evident endpoint. Instead, the communication process may be presumed to continue beyond the point of one's ability to experience it. The communication process, therefore, may consist of episodes of interpersonal contact at certain times. Nevertheless, the likelihood of future interpersonal encounters suggests that the communication process is continuous rather than a discrete unit of dialogue between interacting individuals.

Take the example of a group facilitator leading a collection of adult learners in a question and answer session. Each interchange between the facilitator and some individual learner could be construed as a single, separate "act" of communication. Nevertheless, when a sequence of such acts is put together, it is possible to conceptualise this sequence as one instructional episode consisting of interactions between combinations of different people present at the time. In addition, the possibility of future interactions is not precluded since it is very likely that there will be future meetings between the learner and facilitator. Such future meetings would

naturally link strongly with the sequences of previous interpersonal encounters and experiences.

Adult communication management theory does not aim to atomise human communication or behavior. It is not a theory supportive of the notion of "frames of human behavior" as the units of analysis. Instead, the focus is essentially on communication as a wholistic process. In other words, understanding the nature of human communication involves an appreciation of the context in which individuals relate and the location of that relationship within the complex of all possible relationships between people in their particular systems. Hence, *Assumption 6 is that human communication is conceived as a continuous process rather than as a discrete act.*

Adult communication management theory also accepts the well established notions that interpersonal communication is inevitable Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) and that it is the most pervasive of all forms of communication (Parks, 1985). Whilst these notions are seen as axiomatic, they do signal the all-embracing nature of interpersonal communication which may be explained and understood in terms of many generalisable, comprehensive principles, concepts, and rules. Based on this line of reasoning, *Assumption 7 is that interpersonal communication is at the root or core of all forms of human communication.*

Arguably, therefore, contemporary scholarly literature and research in interpersonal communication should be incorporated in the rationale of any human communication theoretical perspective. Consistent with this claim, adult communication management theory acknowledges, within its conceptual framework, the centrality of interpersonal communication theory. It is emphasised, however, that such a theoretical core must be complemented by a mechanism or structure for understanding the nature and effects of contextual variables on how interacting adults manage communication processes. Thus, *Assumption 8 is that human communication processes need to be understood in terms of the contexts in which they occur.*

There are undoubtedly other other assumptions which could relate to the adult communication management perspective. For example, one could list assumptions about the actual nature of human communication processes. For purposes of this paper, however, additional assumptions about the nature of human communication, as conceived within adult communication management theory, are embedded in the theoretical outline which follows. It is reasonably certain that, as this perspective continues to be developed, such additional assumptions may well need to be isolated and critically tested.

Conceptual framework of adult communication management

There are three significant contributing perspectives to adult communication management theory. The first is the interpersonal perspective which is seen to be at the core of the theoretical approach and fundamental to all forms of human communication. It is assumed, moreover, that the interpersonal communication processes described in this section, apply to all situations where individuals interact with other persons and where people's communication and behaviors are largely shaped by their perceptions of the quality of their relationships and communication with others. *Essentially, the interpersonal perspective derives from the social cognition domain, and more particularly from concepts central to constructivist theory.*

The second contributing perspective focuses on the context of human communication. Within this orientation, it is possible to determine both how the setting can influence the way individuals communicate with others, and how individuals, by the ways they communicate, can influence the nature and culture of their organisations or systems. To this extent, people in systems are not simply victims of environmental forces. *The "people-in-systems" perspective recognises that people can become active agents of change within their systems or organisations through interventions based on sound understandings of contemporary happenings in those systems.* Such understandings should include a grasp not only of the overt culture of systems but also of the hidden dimensions or "shadow side" (Egan, 1991).

Competence in communication represents the third of the perspectives on which adult communication management theory is founded. This perspective on communication competence has been the subject of considerable scholarly inquiry in interpersonal communication literature (Parks, 1985,1977; Spitzberg, 1989; Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984; Wiemann, 1977; Wiemann and Backlund, 1980; Irwin, 1981,1985; Penman, 1981,1985). More recently, the nature of interpersonal communication competence has been considered in relation to issues of identification and assessment in vocational teaching settings (Kaye, 1992a). In essence, the competence perspective relates to both the interpersonal and people-in-systems bases of adult communication management theory, since competence in this sense may refer not only to abilities to relate to other persons but also to the abilities to shape environments so that interpersonal communication is optimised.

The three contributing perspectives will be outlined briefly in the following section of this paper. It may help to think of these contributing perspectives in terms of a developmental sequence. There is, for example, the theoretical core represented by the interpersonal element. Surrounding this is the systemic contextual component of the adult communication management conceptual framework. Finally, the competence perspective is superimposed on both the interpersonal and

people-in-systems dimensions of the framework. To this extent, individuals can exhibit competence not only in their face-to-face communication with other individuals but also in their management of systems to facilitate effective interpersonal communication.

The interpersonal communication contributing perspective

"Communication" is a much abused term, partly because popular writers have tended to restrict its meaning almost exclusively to the exchange of messages, and partly because scholars have broadened its meaning to include anything from direct interpersonal contact to mediated monologue such as radio or television broadcasting. At the heart of all these different conceptions, however, is the conviction and reality that communication is basically a cognitive process. In practice, all people tend to act and communicate on the basis of their interpretations of their worlds and their experiences.

Within the literature of contemporary communication theory, the constructivist approach offers the most robust explanation of how interacting individuals interpret and act upon their communication. Perhaps the best known articulation of the constructivist approach can be found in the now classic work of Delia, O'Keefe and O'Keefe (1982). These authors defined *interpersonal communication as the reciprocal construction of meaning*. In their view, people communicate with each other on the basis of their perceptions and impressions of the nature and quality of existing or potential relationships.

According to constructivist theory, *individuals create these perceptions and impressions of others and of their relationships with other people, through the application of interpersonal construct systems.* "Constructs" are something like mental building blocks individuals use to develop images of other people. They are traditionally seen as bi-polar adjective pairs like "sincere-insincere" or "expert-inexpert". Constructs may be "physical", such as "tall-short" or "bearded-clean shaven", or they may be "psychological", for instance "friendly-unfriendly" or "trustworthy-untrustworthy".

The constructivists argue that the more psychological interpersonal constructs individuals use in forming impressions or images of others, the more cognitively complex they become (Crockett, 1965; Crockett, Mahood and Press, 1975; O'Keefe and Delia, 1982; O'Keefe and Sypher, 1981; Sypher, 1984).In this sense, cognitive complexity has been traditionally measured by means of the Role category Questionnaire (RCQ) (Crockett, 1965). This technique involves people writing freehand descriptions of individuals they know and like or dislike. Subjects are allowed five minutes for each description. Cognitive complexity scores are obtained by summing the number of psychological constructs used by each subject for both descriptions.

In recent years, the intellectual legitimacy and integrity of the cognitive complexity concept has been vigorously challenged. Essentially, critics of constructivist theory have proposed that cognitive complexity is nothing more than loquacity or verbosity (Beatty and Payne, 1984a, 1984b, 1985; Rubin and Henzl, 1984; Powers, Jordan and Street, 1979). The reason for this criticism stems from the constructivist notion that the quantity of constructs possessed and used corresponds directly with the degree of one's cognitive complexity. According to critics of constructivist theory, therefore, cognitive complexity as identified by the RCQ measure may be simply a reflection of people's desires to use as many words as possible, or to use more words than necessary. Despite this line of criticism, no useful alternative to the RCQ measure has to date been proposed.

As is evident, the notion of cognitive complexity is crucial to the rationale of constructivism. People form impressions of other individuals on the basis of the constructs they typically use. Guided by these impressions, people then make "strategic choices' about how to communicate with and act toward others. This process strongly suggests that the accuracy of these impressions and perceptions becomes an important issue. Misperceptions or misinterpretations of others' intentions may lead to unnecessary deterioration or destabilisation of potentially worthwhile interpersonal relationships. This point is particularly relevant to the context of formal learning, where effective learner-facilitator relationships and communication are closely associated with desired learning outcomes.

Within Australia, scholars who have been influenced by constructivist theory, have elaborated the person perception process by the integration of attribution theory with personal and interpersonal construct theory (Irwin, 1983; Kaye, 1986a, 1986c). In essence, these authors have suggested that *people use their interpersonal construct systems to attribute meaning to the behavior and communication of others.* Additionally, since attribution theory attempts to explain how people ascribe reasons for the ways in which others communicate and act, the nature and number of constructs individuals use to attribute cause for others' communication assume critical importance.

In many cases, people make dispositional attributions when experiencing unfamiliar situations. Thus, one person might form the impression that another communicated or acted in a certain way because that person was typically intolerant, lacking in fairness, or supercilious. Such attributions are based on judgements of another's personality traits or dispositions which may be considered to be relatively enduring.

Quite often, however, attributions of meaning or intent can be more specific, since an individual's communication or actions toward someone else may be readily explained in terms of some element in the situation at the time. For example, a teacher's evident impatience with a particular student may be attributed by an independent perceiver to the student's repeated failure to submit assigned work by the due date. The student,

however, might construe an image of the teacher as someone who is typically lacking in understanding, compassion and forgiveness.

Based on their interpretations of why certain people act and communicate as they do, individuals develop their own preferred ways of communicating with others. Nevertheless, since interpersonal communication involves interacting persons constructing images of each other and of the state of their relationship, the quality of that communication is optimal when both persons share, coordinate, and clarify their perceptions. This kind of reciprocity usually ensures that any misattributions of intent or disposition surface before they become the basis for future communication and behavior.

It is not my intention in this paper to provide an exhaustive outline of all facets of contemporary constructivist theory. The purpose of including the above statement on constructivist theory was to emphasise the foundational nature of this orientation as far as the evolving adult communication management perspective is concerned. What follows is a similar statement about the people-in-systems perspective which, within the framework of adult communication management, is seen to build upon and provide a context for the constructivist theoretical core.

The people-in-systems contributing perspective

Although, in one sense, human communication principles may be regarded as generic and therefore not context-specific, it is difficult to argue against the notion that the systems in which people communicate do have some influence on the nature and quality of that communication. Consistent with this line of reasoning, Egan and Cowan (1979) developed the people-in systems perspective. It has been subsequently elaborated and refined, mainly through the introduction of a change management focus (Egan, 1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1991).

The essence of the people-in-systems approach is that the design elements of the system - for example the goals of the system, or the structure of the system - have an impact on the quality and amount of communication between people in the system. There is a recurrent theme in Egan's change management writings that "communication is the lifeblood of systems" (e.g. Egan, 1985: 175; 1988a: 157). In Egan's view, however, communication is virtually synonymous with "feedback".

Feedback may be either corrective or confirmatory. In either case it is necessary for the growth and development of effective systems. Implicit in this imperative is the notion that absence of feedback or communication leaves one in a state of uncertainty. As is now well established, the reduction of uncertainty provides one basis for the development of improved communication (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). More recently, uncertainty reduction theory has been applied to the field of intercultural communication (Gudykunst, 1986a, 1986b).

Egan's somewhat restrictive definition of communication-as-feedback leads one to speculate as to whether communication in a more global and scientific sense could still be regarded as "the lifeblood of systems". Adult communication management theory holds that this is so, especially as the focus in Egan's work is not on systems *per se*, but rather on *people* in systems. A focus on people, moreover, is consistent with the substance of any study of people viz. their communication and behaviors.

As has been already argued, the communication and behavior of people can be affected by the nature and structure of the system in which they happen to be situated. The term "system" effectively means more than "organisation", since it refers to anything from a nuclear family to a community. There are all kinds of systems. Schools, hospitals, and prisons are systems. Local sporting clubs, professional societies, and PTA groups are also systems. All these systems, of course, differ in the manner in which they operate and in the effectiveness with which they operate. In recent times, serious attempts have been made to identify the qualities which distinguish effective from ineffective systems (Peters and Waterman, 1984; Peters and Austin, 1989).

For understanding and managing change within systems, the people-in-systems perspective emphasises the need for change agents to recognise the presence of a "shadow side" in any system. The shadow side is typified by happenings which are not sanctioned as or considered to be part of the overt culture of a system. Included here are the hidden agendas, the unwritten rules, the informal norms and practices, and generally, anything which can "mess up" a system. In short, the shadow side is characterised by events that are unpredictable and often undiscussable. The word "arationality" has also been used to refer to the shadow side of systems, since shadow side occurrences cannot be readily explained in terms of logic or the absence of it.

In general, the "shadow side" as a phenomenon within systems has not been systematically studied. It is easy to appreciate why this is so, since other aspects of organisational life lend themselves more neatly to scholarly investigation. Unfortunately, not all systems are by nature orderly. This realisation alone constitutes a discouragement to those who persist in assuming that systems can be completely understood or mapped in terms of some form of logic or straightforward diagnostic procedures. Occasionally, however, there have been isolated breakthroughs in developing a deeper understanding of the shadow side of systems. For example, the notion of "groupthink" has led to much consideration about the dangers of groups becoming too cohesive (Janis, 1972).

One criticism one could make of the people-in-systems perspective is that it does appear to apply more obviously to formal systems than to informal ones. Not all systems, for example, have clearly articulated mission statements. Yet Egan's (1985) Model A begins with some consideration of

such system design elements as mission statements. Bearing this in mind, the adult communication management approach softens the notion of "mission statement" to something as general as "for what reasons does this particular system exist?"

Overall, the people-in-systems perspective consists of two parts or "models". The more recently developed version of Model A (Egan, 1988a) is concerned with mapping a system by examining the "current scenario (or story)" and postulating a "preferred scenario (or story)".In this sense, it has a certain strategic quality because it is future-oriented. The scenarios focus noticeably on factors affecting the behavior and communication of people in their systems. For example, in any scenario one might consider such issues as role clarity (or confusion), responsibilities and accountabilities, levels of professional relationships, flat or hierarchical management structures, and status and power differentials. It also takes cognisance of the "leverage" people in systems have in order to effect change. Some principles of leverage include time, financial resources, market forces, and current levels of staff competence. Once the degree of leverage has been considered, one is able to develop a strategy to move from the current to the preferred state.

Coincidentally, this model was developed before the more recent move toward understanding the phenomenon of "storytelling" in organisational settings (Boje,1991; Wilkins and Thompson, 1991; Jones, 1991; Gephart, 1991; Hawes, 1991; Vance, 1991; Browning, 1991). This concept of "storytelling" refers essentially to the ways in which people construct meanings about other individuals with whom they interact and the systems in which they operate. it has also been suggested that changes in storytelling may lead to changes in systems. Thus, it has been noted that

people... think of organisations as mansions with many rooms where people engage in conversation to do their work. people will tell stories to make sense of, and to effect change within and outside, that mansion. If we can change the stories that are told and who gets invited to a conversation room to tell stories, then we can change that organisation (Boje, 1991:5).

To this extent, the "storytelling" concept is not only consistent with Model A but also sheds some light on the process of understanding systems.

The implementation of desired or necessary change strategies identified in Model A may then be planned according to Model B (Egan, 1988b). Just as Model A is about the assessment of needed changes, Model B is about making these changes happen. Thus, whilst Model A may assist one in determining how interpersonal communication may be improved within a system, Model B enables one to develop a mechanism for ensuring that there is actual improvement in communication between people in that system.

Egan is currently developing a Model C which will examine ways of understanding and managing the shadow side of systems. As this is as yet undeveloped, it is at least worth noting that any application of Models A and B should keep in mind the need to include any knowledge of the shadow side when generating scenarios. This point is heavily emphasised in the adult communication management approach.

The contributing perspective of competence

Whilst the interpersonal communication perspective is at the core of the adult communication management framework, the *concept of competence has been specifically introduced to address issues of how effectively people in systems communicate with each other.* The term "communication competence" has been used in scholarly writings for several decades, although comparatively recently bureaucratic policies in some countries like Australia have given the impression that the idea of a "competency-based process" is distinctly novel (e.g. Finn Report, 1991; Mayer Report, 1992).

According to Parks (1985), "communicator (or "communicative") competence" has been explained in three different ways. Firstly, it has been understood as the ability of people to maximise the achievement of their goals.Thus, communicator competence "represents the degree to which individuals perceive they have satisfied their goals in a given social situation without jeopardising their ability or opportunity to pursue their other subjectively more important goals" (Parks, 1985:175). This definition seems to place communicator competence within the framework of thinking and action associated with *personal control.*

The notion of personal control (or "effectance", as it is sometimes called) is at the heart of nearly all conceptualisations of communicator competence. Because the term "personal control" refers to individuals' basic needs or desires to influence their environments, including their social and interpersonal environments, it has significant implications for both the interpersonal and people-in-systems perspectives. More specifically, individuals who are capable of exercising personal control over their social environments so as to maximise the achievement of their goals, may be regarded as competent in the coordination and management of interpersonal communication processes.

It may be helpful to provide one or two examples. Take the case of someone attending a conference. This person's ostensible goals may include learning about current developments and thought in the field of study or practice, or guaging audience reaction to his or her paper before considering its potential for publication. In reality, however, the person in question may have a more pressing private goal of impressing certain luminaries who could subsequently agree to act as referees in the case of any academic posts he or she may coose to apply for in the future.

Again, think of teachers as communicators. Their primary goal is to ensure that their students learn successfully. To achieve this, they need to determine which communication approaches to use with their students in order to maximise the opportunity for desired learning outcomes. On this point, it has been suggested that "teachers-as-communicators.... need to maintain control over their relationships with learners so that opportunities for effective learning are not impaired" (Kaye, 1992a: 4).

To this extent, the kind of classroom games teachers play with students may determine the degree to which they continue to possess or lose personal control over the teaching-learning environment. The titles of some of these games are almost self-explanatory: the "tea-and-sympathy" game, the "stick 'em up" game, and the "doormat" game (Lett, 1971). Within the context of Australian university and college systems particularly, Kaye (1975) identified the "classroom war" game and the "guru syndrome" as two archetypes of educational practice. In teaching, therefore, communicator competence through personal control may involve a judicious selection of an interpersonal approach which encourages the development and attainments of learners.

Communicator competence may alternatively be described in terms of the component abilities or skills which collectively represent the competence domain (e.g. Cushman and Craig, 1976). One problem with this approach is the difficulty of deciding which skills are the most essential, both from the point of view of present survival and future development. As has been noted, "whilst most textbooks include a common core of chapter headings or topics which appear to delineate important component abilities or skills, there is no absolute consensus as to which skills are central or marginal to the development of communicator competence" (Kaye, 1992a: 4).

Listening appears to be the component skill most often emphasised (Bostrom, 1991, 1990; Storey and McQuillen, 1991; Cooper, 1991; Husband, Cooper and monsour, 1988; Wolvin and Coakley, 1988; Rubin, 1982). It is closely followed by references to assertiveness (or "assertion" as it is sometimes called) (Bryan and Gallois, 1992; Fensterheim and Baer, 1989; Bolton, 1979), the expression and interpretation of nonverbal cues (Woolfolk, 1981; Kaye, 1986b, 1986c, 1983a, 1983b), negotiation (Fisher and Ury, 1986), conflict resolution (DeBono, 1986; Bolton, 1979; Morrill and Thomas, 1992; Kaye, 1992b) and overcoming communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1977; Hansford and Hattie, 1982; Buller, 1987; Kaye, 1992b). As applied to educational settings, "questioning" has become seen, in recent times, as a very important communication skill for teachers (Hansford, 1988; Dillon, 1990).

Of course, all the skills mentioned above can be argued to be necessary for effective classroom performance. They are, moreover, not the only skills one would expect teachers to develop. For example, one could make out a very convincing argument for the mandatory inclusion of such skills as

the use of appropriate language in different kinds of interpersonal settings, accuracy in person perception and attribution of intent, social perspective-taking, and the construction and coordination of meanings in multicultural classrooms.

In addition to considerations of goal achievement and interpersonal skills, a third approach to understanding and developing communicator competence involves the evaluation, by someone like an observer or supervisor, of an individual's communication and actions. The evaluation of communicator competence is usually based on the following criteria: "(1) the ability to formulate and achieve objectives; (2) the ability to collaborate effectively with others i.e. to be interdependent; and (3) the ability to adapt appropriately to situational or environmental variations" (Bochner and Kelley, 1974; 288).

Regardless of which approach one uses to understand and develop communicator competence, there are three important points which need to be kept in mind. Firstly, competence implies more than the possession of "skill". *Competence involves a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which distinguish professionals from technicians.* As one eminent writer has observed

competency is usually understood to mean possessing the required knowledge, skill, and ability to perform a task adequately. At a professional level, competency includes understanding the processes involved as well as having performance skills and an academic and theoretical background. This generally accepted concept of professional competence is the basis for differentiating between a professional and a technician. The technician's training emphasises performance skills whereas the professional's preparation includes more theoretical background, academic content, and higher-level abstractions (Peter, 1975:8).

This statement, associating "competence" with professional rather than technician levels of operation was made with specific reference to teacher education. Thus, Peter (1975) was essentially arguing that competent teachers demonstrate professionalism in that they are able not only to perform acts of teaching but also critically analyse and think through their performances. "Competence", therefore, presupposes one's ability to operate at sophisticated levels of reasoning and thinking. This notion is brought out in Peter's (1975) claim that the professional's actions and communication are based on "higher-level abstractions".

A second point about the nature of competence is that there are varying degrees of excellence associated with performance of particular professional roles. For example, individuals may be minimally competent, moderately competent, or highly competent. despite the fact that these gradations are both idiosyncratic and arbitrary, they serve to illustrate the point that competence does not simply equal some ultimate of excellence. Thus, it has been suggested that

although the word "excellence" has become yet another buzzword in managerial and organisation development literature, a misconception has evidently prevailed that excellence represents some achievable, absolute point of perfection. There would, therefore, be little incentive for workers to strive for improvement over their present levels of performance if the belief persisted that it is theoretically impossible for one to excel beyond a level of performance which could be described as "excellent". The notion of degrees of competence or excellence is especially applicable to the domain of interpersonal communication competence, since humans, unlike machines, are capable of being understood more accurately and of communicating more effectively with others largely as a result of repeated opportunities to experience, practise, and apply communication strategies (Kaye, 1989a: 6).

If one is to accept this line of reasoning that there are degrees or levels of competence, it follows that the development and refinement of competence is potentially a lifelong process. This view, particularly with respect to communicator competence, is espoused in the rationale of adult communication management. In theory, adults can manage their communication with others more effectively as a result of systematic and mature reflection on personal and interpersonal experiences.

The final point to be made about competence, and especially communicator competence, is that *there have been very few attempts to apply understandings of communication competence to workplace settings* (Monge, Backman, Dillard and Eisenberg, 1982: 505). This has certainly been true of educational workplace settings. The subfield of instructional communication appears to have operated somewhat independently of the subfields of interpersonal or organisational communication. For predictable reasons, the three subfields continue to maintain relatively separate identities.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the adult communication management perspective sees these divisions as arbitrary and, to an extent, artificial. Each division can enrich another by providing a set of new ideas and concepts. Adult communication management is wedded to the conviction that subdisciplinary separatism within the field of communication studies is likely to yield rather barren thinking. Present developments in the ICA Division of Instructional Communication, for example, suggest that significant issues addressed in other educational literature e.g. applications of the "quality" concept to learning, developing higher-order competencies like critical thinking within the conceptual framework of human communication theory etc. appear to be either unknown or simply ignored.

In summary, the three contributing perspectives which inform adult communication management theory at present logically integrate in a particular way. The core, represented by the interpersonal communication

perspective, is embedded within the people-in-systems conceptual framework. Thus, interpersonal communication or, "the lifeblood of systems", is understood in terms of how system members influence or are influenced by forces shaping particular systems. Finally, competent communicators are those who are able to exercise a measure of control over their social environments. To this extent, their competence may be conceived as a form of leadership which has the potential to bring about personal, interpersonal, and organisational change.

Conclusion

Adult communication management appears to have provided a workable and refreshingly applicable perspective to graduate students interested in applied communication theory. In part, this is due to the students' perceived attractiveness of the eclectic rationale of adult communication management theory when contrasted with the narrow subdisciplinary perspectives evident in contemporary communication divisional literature.

The applied nature of adult communication management theory, moreover, enables graduate students, particularly professionals in adult and vocational education, to see adult communication management theory not simply as a selective pot-pourri of fashionable contemporary theories of human communication. Instead, *adult communication management is seen as providing a reasonable basis for developing an epistemology of practice.*

There are reasons why adult communication management theory will develop international currency and why it may not. Firstly, adult communication management theory has originated in an educational rather than in a humanities or social sciences context. One reason why it may never take off, at least as an area of academic and scholarly endeavour, is that neither educationists nor social scientists may want to consider any development which may be construed as peripheral to their disciplinary or interdisciplinary fields. Academic imperialism and territoriality make it very difficult for "new kids on the block", even when the new kids are really quite old but have not been given many opportunities to test their thinking against other current gurus.

To many educational practitioners, moreover, the field of communication studies means very little. Within Australia, the only area of contemporary communication thinking which in recent times has had serious impact on educational practitioners undertaking university graduate studies has been adult communication management. At the University of Technology, Sydney, graduate students in the Master of Education course are able to undertake a major in adult communication management by completing two subjects (Adult Communication Management 1 and 2) and a major independent study project (about 15,000 words). This represents about fifty percent of the Masters course. At present, there is an

increasing number of graduate students in the Master of Education course studying Adult Communication Management as a major. Three postgraduate students are writing dissertations on aspects of adult communication management.

Another reason why this perspective may not assume a toehold in the field of educational practice is that most of the scholarship in instructional communication, especially as it is reported in journals of ICA or SCA, appears in the eyes of "users" to be too abstruse and ignorant of the realities of real educational practice. If adult communication management is tarred with the same brush, it too, will be seen as a field of study remote from the realities and practicalities of teaching and learning.

It is with some difficulty and regret that these remarks need to be made. There seems to be every reason to welcome new thinking in what often appears to the author to be relatively sterile contemporary literature in instructional communication. Judging by the growth of student numbers enrolled in Adult Communication Management at the University of Technology, Sydney, this new perspective is becoming seen to be usable, applicable, and relevant to the work of adult and vocational educational practitioners and professionals. Hopefully, there will be other opportunities for adult communication management theory to develop and be refined as a result of constructive and intellectually challenging criticism from contemporary scholars in applied communication theory and research.

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